REMARKS

ON

Mr. WAKEFIELD'S ENQUIRY.

[Price Two Shillings.]

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REMARKS

ON

Mr. GILBERT WAKEFIELD's

ENQUIRY

INTO THE

EXPEDIENCY AND PROPRIETY

OF

PUBLIC OR SOCIAL WORSHIP.

— — — in ſwarming cities vaſt,
Aſſembled men, to the deep organ join
The long reſounding voice, oft breaking clear,
At ſolemn pauſes, through the ſwelling baſe;
And as each mingling flame increaſes each,
In one united ardour riſe to heaven.

THOMSON.

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1792.

THOUGHTS

ON

PUBLIC WORSHIP, &c.

THERE are ſome practices which have not been defended becauſe they have never been attacked. Of this number is *Public or Social Worſhip*. It has been recommended, urged, enforced, but never vindicated. Through worldlineſs, ſcepticiſm, indolence, diſſatisfaction with the manner of conducting it, it has been often neglected; but it is a new thing to hear it condemned. The pious and the good have lamented its inſufficiency to the reforma-

tion of the world, but they were yet to learn that it was unfriendly to it. Satisfied with ſilent and ſolitary deſertion, thoſe who did not concur in the homage paid by their fellow-citizens were content to acquieſce in its propriety, and had not hitherto aſſumed the dignity of a ſect. A late pamphlet of Mr. Wakefield's has therefore excited the attention of the public, partly, no doubt, from the known abilities of the author, but ſtill more from the novelty and ſtrangeneſs of the doctrine. If intended as an apology, no publication can be more ſeaſonable, but if meant as an exhortation, or rather a dehortation, it is a labour which many will think, from the complexion of the times and the tendencies of increaſing habits, might well have been ſpared. It is an awkward circumſtance for the apoſtle of ſuch a perſuaſion, that he will have many practical diſciples whom he will hardly care to own; and that if he ſucceeds in making proſelytes, he muſt take them *from* the more ſober and orderly part of the community; and claſs them,

as

as far as this circumſtance affords a diſtinction, along with the uneducated, the profligate, and the unprincipled. The negative tenet he inculcates, does not mark his converts with ſufficient preciſion: their ſcrupuloſity will be in danger of being confounded with the careleſſneſs of their neighbours; and it will be always neceſſary to aſk, Do you abſtain becauſe you are of this religion, or becauſe you are of no religion at all?

It would be unfair, however, to endeavour to render Mr. Wakefield's opinions invidious: they, as well as every other opinion, muſt be ſubmitted to the teſt of argument; and Public Worſhip, as well as every other practice, muſt ſtand on the baſis of utility and good ſenſe, or it muſt not ſtand at all: and in the latter caſe, it is immaterial whether it is left to moulder like the neglected ruin, or battered down like the formidable tower.

It will ſtand upon this baſis, if it can be ſhewn to be agreeable to our nature, ſanctioned by univerſal practice, coun-

tenanced by revealed religion, and that its tendencies are favourable to the morals and manners of mankind.

What is Public Worſhip? Kneeling down together while prayers are ſaid of a certain length and conſtruction, and hearing diſcourſes made to a ſentence of ſcripture called a text!—Such might be the definition of an unenlightened perſon, but ſuch would certainly not be Mr. Wakefield's. The queſtion ought to be agitated on much larger ground. If theſe practices are ſhewn to be novel, it does not follow that Public Worſhip is ſo, in that extenſive ſenſe which includes all modes and varieties of expreſſion. To eſtabliſh its antiquity, we muſt therefore inveſtigate its nature.

Public Worſhip is the public expreſſion of homage to the Sovereign of the univerſe. It is that tribute from men united in families, in towns, in communities, which individually men owe to their Maker. Every nation has therefore found ſome organ by which to expreſs this homage, ſome language,

guage, rite, or ſymbol, by which to make known their religious feelings; but this organ has not always, nor chiefly been words. The killing an animal, the throwing a few grains of incenſe into the fire, the eating bread and drinking wine, are all in themſelves indifferent actions, and have apparently little connection with devotion; yet all of theſe have been uſed as worſhip, and are worſhip when uſed with that intention. The ſolemn ſacrifices and anniverſary feſtivals of the Jews, at which their capital and their temple were thronged with votaries from every diſtant part of the kingdom, were ſplendid expreſſions of their religious homage. Their worſhip, indeed, was interwoven with their whole civil conſtitution; and ſo, though in a ſubordinate degree, was that of the Greeks and Romans, and moſt of the ſtates of antiquity. There has never exiſted a nation, at all civilized, which has not had ſome appointed form of ſupplication, ſome ſtated mode of ſignifying the dependance we are under to the ſupreme Being, and as a na-

tion imploring his protection. It is not pretended that theſe modes were all equally rational, equally edifying, equally proper for imitation, equally ſuitable for every ſtate of ſociety; they have varied according as a nation was more or leſs advanced in refinement and decorum, more or leſs addicted to ſymbolical expreſſion—to violent geſticulation—and more or leſs converſant with abſtract ideas and metaphyſical ſpeculation. But whether the Deity is worſhipped by ſtrewing flowers and building tabernacles of verdure; by dances round the altar and the ſhouts of a cheerful people; by offering the firſt fruits of harveſt, and partaking in the ſocial feaſt; by tones of muſic, interpreted only by the heart; or by verbal expreſſions of gratitude and adoration—whether the hallelujahs of aſſembled multitudes riſe together in ſolemn chorus; or whether they liſten with compoſed and reverential attention to the voice of one man, appointed by them to be the organ of their feelings—whether a number of people meet together like the Quakers,

Quakers, and each in ſilence prefers his mental petition—wherever men together perform a ſtated act as an expreſſion of homage to their Maker, there is the eſſence of public worſhip; and public worſhip has therefore this mark of being agreeable to the nature of man, that it has been found agreeable to the ſenſe of mankind in all ages and nations.

It is, indeed, difficult to imagine that beings, ſenſible of common wants and a common nature, ſhould *not* join together in imploring common bleſſings; that, prone as men are in every other circumſtance to aſſociate together, and communicate the electric fire of correſpondent feelings, they ſhould act with unſocial reſerve only where thoſe intereſts are concerned which are confeſſedly the moſt important. Such is the temperament of man, that in every act and every event he anxiouſly looks around him to claim the gratulation or ſympathy of his fellows. Religion, ſays Mr. Wakefield, is a perſonal thing; ſo is marriage, ſo is the birth of a child, ſo is the loſs of a

beloved relative, yet on all theſe occaſions we are ſtrongly impelled to public ſolemnization. We neither laugh alone, nor weep alone, why then ſhould we pray alone? None of our feelings are of a more communicable nature than our religious ones. If devotion really exiſts in the heart of each individual, it is morally impoſſible it ſhould exiſt there apart and ſingle. So many ſeparate tapers, burning ſo near each other, in the very nature of things muſt catch, and ſpread into one common flame. The reciprocal advantages, which public and private worſhip poſſeſs over each other, are ſufficiently obvious to make both deſirable. While the former is more animated, the latter comes more intimately home to our own circumſtances and feelings, and allows our devotion to be more particular and appropriated. To moſt of the objections made againſt the one, the other is equally liable. Superſtition can drop her ſolitary beads, as well as vociferate the repetition of a public collect: if ſymptoms of wearineſs and inattention may be obſerved in our

churches, we have only to look into the diaries of the moſt pious Chriſtians, and we ſhall find ſtill heavier complaints of the dulneſs and deadneſs of their ſpiritual frame: the thoughts may wander in the cloſet when the door is ſhut: folly and ſelfiſhneſs will ſend up improper petitions from the cell as well as from the congregation: nay Public Worſhip has this great advantage, that it teaches thoſe to pray, who, not being accuſtomed to think, cannot of themſelves pray with judgment. To all, it teaches that we are not to pray for excluſive advantages, but to conſider ourſelves as members of a community. Our inmoſt wiſhes learn reſtraint while our petitions are thus directed, and our deſires by degrees conform themſelves to that ſpirit of moderation and juſtice, without which we cannot join in the comprehenſive prayer, that muſt include the joint ſupplications of a numerous aſſembly.—Public Worſhip has this further advantage over private, that it is better ſecured againſt languor on one ſide, and enthuſiaſm on the other. If the

devotional

devotional ſentiment has not taken deep root in his mind, a man will ſcarcely keep up, in ſilence and in ſolitude, an intercourſe to which he is prompted by no external appearance, and of which he is reminded by no circumſtance of time or place. And if his ſenſe of inviſible things is ſtrong enough to engage his mind in ſpite of theſe diſadvantages, there is room to fear, leſt, by brooding in ſilence over objects of ſuch indiſtinct vaſtneſs, his bewildered ideas and exalted imagination ſhould lead him to the reveries of myſticiſm; an extreme no leſs to be dreaded than that of indifference. When Mr. Wakefield, to ſtrengthen his argument for ſecluſion in our religious exerciſes, directs our attention to the mount of Olives and the garden of Gethſemane, he ſhould recollect that our Saviour ſuſtained a character to which we cannot preſume to aſpire; and that, however favourable the deſert and the wilderneſs have been to prophets viſited by extraordinary illuminations, they cannot be equally ſuitable to the regular devotion of ordinary Chriſtians.

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From the gloom of the cloiſter and the lonelineſs of the cell, have proceeded the moſt extravagant deviations from nature and from reaſon. Enthuſiaſm is indeed moſt dangerous in a crowd, but it ſeldom originates there. The mind, heated with intenſe thinking, adopts illuſions to which it is not expoſed when its devotion is guided and bounded by addreſſes which are intended to meet the common ſentiments of a numerous aſſembly. Religion then appears with the moſt benignant aſpect, is then leaſt likely to be miſtaken, when the preſence of our fellow-creatures points out its connection with the buſineſſes of life and the duties of ſociety. Solitary devotion, for worldly minds, is inſufficient, for weak minds it is not profitable, for ardent minds it is not ſafe.

We muſt however do that juſtice to the author of the Enquiry, as to confeſs that he betrays no diſpoſition to carry theſe exerciſes to any extreme. On the contrary, ſome of his expreſſions ſeem to ſtrike at the root of all *prayer*, properly ſo called, as being the

weak effort of an infirm and unphiloſophical mind to alter the order of nature and the decrees of Providence, in which it rather becomes the wiſe man to acquieſce with a manly reſignation. Without entering into a diſcuſſion, in which, perhaps, we might miſrepreſent his ſentiments; as, in the greater part of his pamphlet, he has taken the ground of ſcripture, which undoubtedly countenances the earneſtneſs, and almoſt the importunity of petition; it may be ſufficient for the preſent purpoſe to obſerve, that if there exiſts a man who, believing himſelf to be in the continual preſence of infinite power, directed by infinite love and tender compaſſion to all his creatures—thinking often of this Being, and habitually referring every diſpoſition of events to his providence—feeling himſelf more conſtantly and intimately connected with him than with all creation beſides—can in every viciſſitude of his life, in ſickneſs and in ſorrow, in imminent danger, anxious uncertainty, deſertion or loſs of friends, and all the trying circumſtances of

humanity

humanity that fleſh is heir to; forbear, for himſelf or for thoſe dearer to him than himſelf, to put up one petition to the throne of God—ſuch a one may be allowed to ſtrike out every petition in the Lord's Prayer but that comprehenſive one, *thy will be done.* If his faith be equally lively, his devotional feelings equally fervent, his ſenſe of dependence upon God equally felt in his inmoſt ſoul, we dare not preſume to cenſure the temperance of his religious addreſſes. We reſpect the ſubdued ſobriety of his wiſhes, and we do not, we cannot ſuppoſe him deſerted by the ſupreme Being for that modeſt forbearance which proceeds from a reſignation ſo abſolute and complete. Others, however, whoſe philoſophy is not of ſo firm a texture, may plead the example of him who prayed, though with meek ſubmiſſion, that the cup of bitterneſs might paſs from him; and who, as the moment of ſeparation approached, interceded for his friends and followers with all the anxiety of affectionate tenderneſs. But we will venture

to

to ſay that practically there is no ſuch philoſopher.—If prayer were not enjoined for the perfection, it would be permitted to the weakneſs of our nature. We ſhould be betrayed into it, if we thought it ſin, and pious ejaculations would eſcape our lips, though we were obliged to preface them with, God forgive me for praying!

To thoſe who preſs the objection, that we cannot ſee in what manner our prayers can be anſwered, conſiſtently with the government of the world according to thoſe general laws by which we find, in fact, that it is governed; it may be ſufficient to ſay, that prayer, being made almoſt an inſtinct of our nature, it cannot be ſuppoſed but that, like all other inſtincts, it has its uſe; that no idea can be *leſs* philoſophical than one which implies, that the exiſtence of a God who governs the world, ſhould make no difference in our conduct; and few things leſs probable than that the child-like ſubmiſſion which bows to the will of a father, ſhould be exactly ſimilar in feature to the ſtubborn patience which bends under the yoke of neceſſity.

It may be further obſerved, that petitions for temporal advantages, ſuch, I mean, as a ſpirit of moderation will allow us to *wiſh* with ſufficient ardour to make them the ſubject of our prayers, are not liable to more objections than petitions for ſpiritual bleſſings. In either caſe the weak man does, and the wiſe man does not expect a miracle. That the arrogant, the worldly, and the licentious, ſhould on a ſudden, and without their own ſtrenuous endeavours, be rendered humble, ſimple-minded, and pure of heart, would be as great a violation of the order of nature in the moral world, as it would be in the natural world that the harveſt ſhould ripen without the co-operation of the huſbandman, and the ſlow influence of the ſeaſons. Indeed, as temporal bleſſings are leſs in our power than diſpoſitions, and are ſometimes entirely out of it, it ſeems more reaſonable of the two to pray for the former than for the latter; and it is remarkable that, in the model given us in the Lord's Prayer, there is not a ſingle petition for any virtue or good diſpoſition,

poſition, but there is one for daily bread. Good diſpoſitions, particularly a ſpirit of reſignation, are declared and implied in the petitions, but they are not prayed for: events are prayed for, and circumſtances out of our own power, relative to our ſpiritual concerns, are prayed for, as, the not being led into temptation; but there is no prayer that we may be *made* holy, meek, or merciful. Nor is it an objection to praying for health, that ſickneſs may poſſibly turn out a bleſſing, ſince it is no objection to the uſing all the means in our power to get rid of ſickneſs, which we do as eagerly and as unreſervedly as if we had not the leaſt idea that it ever could be ſalutary. And we do right; for the advantages of ſickneſs are caſual and adventitious; but health is in itſelf, and in its natural tendencies, a bleſſing *devoutly to be wiſhed for*. That no advantage of this nature ought to be prayed or wiſhed for, unqualified with the deepeſt ſubmiſſion to the will of God, is an undoubted truth; and it is a truth likewiſe univerſally acknowledged by all rational Chriſtians.

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It cannot be denied, however, that great reſerve is neceſſary in putting up ſpecific petitions, eſpecially of a public nature; but generally the fault lies in our engaging in wrong purſuits, rather than in imploring upon our purſuits the favour of heaven. Humanity is ſhocked to hear prayers for the ſucceſs of an unjuſt war; but humanity and heaven were *then* offended when the war was engaged in; for war is of a nature ſufficiently ſerious to warrant our prayers to be preſerved from the calamities of it, if we have not voluntarily expoſed ourſelves to them. The frivolous nature of moſt national conteſts appears ſtrongly in this very circumſtance, that petitions from either ſide have the air of a profanation; but if in ſome ſerious conjuncture our country was ready to be overwhelmed by an ambitious neighbour, as that of the Dutch was in the time of Louis the Fourteenth,—in ſuch a ſeaſon of calamity, the ſterneſt philoſopher would give way to the inſtinctive dictates of nature, and implore the help which cometh from on high. The rea-

ſon why *both* ſides cannot pray with propriety, is becauſe *both* ſides cannot act with juſtice.

But ſuppoſing we were to diſcard all petition as the weak effort of infirm minds to alter the unbroken chain of events; as the impatient breathings of craving and reſtleſs ſpirits, not broken into patient acquieſcence with the eternal order of Providence—the nobleſt office of worſhip ſtill remains.

> *Praiſe* is devotion fit for mighty minds,
> The jarring world's agreeing ſacrifice.

And this is ſurely of a ſocial nature. One claſs of religious duties ſeparately conſidered, tends to depreſs the mind, filling it with ingenuous ſhame and wholeſome ſorrow; and to theſe humiliating feelings ſolitude might perhaps be found congenial: but the ſentiments of admiration, love, and joy, ſwell the boſom with emotions which ſeek for fellowſhip and communication. The flame indeed may be kindled by ſilent muſing; but when kindled it muſt infallibly ſpread. The devout heart, penetrated with

with large and affecting views of the immenſity of the works of God, the harmony of his laws, and the extent of his beneficence, burſts into loud and vocal expreſſions of praiſe and adoration; and, from a full and overflowing ſenſibility, ſeeks to expand itſelf to the utmoſt limits of creation. The mind is forcibly carried out of itſelf, and, embracing the whole circle of animated exiſtence, calls on all above, around, below, to help to bear the burden of its gratitude. Joy is too brilliant a thing to be confined within our own boſoms; it burniſhes all nature, and with its vivid colouring gives a kind of factitious life to objects without ſenſe or motion. There cannot be a more ſtriking proof of the ſocial tendency of theſe feelings, than the ſtrong propenſity we have to *ſuppoſe* auditors where there are none. When men are wanting, we addreſs the animal creation; and, rather than have none to partake our ſentiments, we find ſentiment in the muſic of the birds, the hum of inſects, and the low of kine: nay, we call on rocks and

ſtreams and foreſts to witneſs and ſhare our emotions. Hence the royal ſhepherd, ſojourning in caves and ſolitary waſtes, calls on the hills to rejoice and the floods to clap their hands; and the lonely poet, wandering in the deep receſſes of uncultivated nature, finds a temple in every ſolemn grove, and ſwells his chorus of praiſe with the winds that bow the lofty cedars. And can he who, not ſatisfied with the wide range of exiſtence, calls for the ſympathy of the inanimate creation, refuſe to worſhip with his fellow men? Can he who bids "Nature attend," forget to "join every *living* ſoul" in the univerſal hymn? Shall we *ſuppoſe* companions in the ſtillneſs of deſerts, and ſhall we overlook them amongſt friends and townſmen? It cannot be! Social worſhip, for the devout heart, is not more a duty than it is a real want.

If Public Worſhip is thus found to be agreeable to the beſt impulſes of our nature, the pious mind will rejoice to find it, at leaſt, not diſcountenanced by revealed

religion. But its friends, in endeavouring to prove this, muſt carry on the argument under ſome diſadvantage, as Mr. Wakefield, though he lays great ſtreſs on the preſumptive arguments which ſeem to favour the negative ſide of the queſtion, will not allow the ſame force to thoſe which may be urged on the other ſide. *The practice of Chriſt*, he tells us, *is an authority to which all believers will bow the knee, a tribunal by which all our controverſies muſt be awarded:* yet he gives us notice at the ſame time, that to this authority, if brought againſt him, he will not bow the knee; and from this tribunal, if unfriendly to his cauſe, he will appeal; for that prayers and all external obſervances *are beggarly elements*, to be laid aſide in the preſent maturity of the Chriſtian church; and that, *even if ſocial worſhip were an original appendage of the goſpel*, the idea of a *progreſſive Chriſtianity* would juſtify us in rejecting it. With this inequality of conditions, which it is ſufficient juſt to notice, let us conſider the array of texts which are drawn up againſt the prac-

tice in queſtion; and particularly thoſe precepts which, Mr. Wakefield ſays, are evidences that *directly* and *literally* prove Public Worſhip to be *unauthorized by Chriſtianity, and inconſiſtent with it*, and which he diſtinguiſhes from thoſe which condemn it merely by inference.

The firſt of theſe direct evidences is the injunction, not to worſhip as the hypocrites, who are fond of exhibiting in the moſt public places. "And when thou prayeſt, be not as the hypocrites, for they love to pray ſtanding in the ſynagogues, and in the corners of the ſtreets, that they may be ſeen of men; verily I ſay unto you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayeſt, enter into thy cloſet, and when thou haſt ſhut thy door, pray to thy Father who is in ſecret." But is it not evident, that the force of this precept is not aimed againſt public prayer, but againſt private prayer performed in public; againſt the oſtentatious diſplay which ſeeks to diſtinguiſh us from others, not the genuine ſympathy which makes us deſirous of

blending our feelings with theirs? It was devotion obtruding itſelf in the face of buſineſs, amidſt the ſhow and buſtle of the world. It did not ſeek for fellowſhip, but obſervation. It did not want the concurrence of men, but to be ſeen by them. Even in the ſynagogue it was ſilent, ſolitary, unſocial, and with ſullen reſerve and cold diſdain kept itſelf aloof from communion, and invited only applauſe. The Phariſee and the Publican both went up to the temple to worſhip, but they worſhipped not together. Certainly the delicate and modeſt nature of ſincere piety muſt ſhrink from an exhibition like this; and would not wiſh to have its feelings noticed, but where at the ſame time they may be ſhared. This text therefore ſeems to be only a caution reſpecting the proper performance of our *cloſet* duties.

" Jeſus ſaith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye ſhall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jeruſalem, worſhip the Father. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true wor-

ſhippers ſhall worſhip the Father in ſpirit and in truth, for the Father ſeeketh ſuch to worſhip him. God is a ſpirit." True it is, the hour is come in which it is allowed by all rational believers, that the acceptableneſs of prayer does not depend on the ſacredneſs of any particular place. The Jews wanted to be informed of this. They, naturally enough, were apt to conſider their temple as the habitation of the divine Being, in the ſame manner as a palace is the habitation of an earthly ſovereign, a place where men may come to make their court, and bring preſents, and aſk favours in return. Theſe ideas have been done away by thoſe more honourable notions of the divine Being which our Saviour and good men after him have laboured to inculcate. We conceive of a church as of a building, not for God to reſide, but for men to aſſemble in; for, though God is a ſpirit, men have bodies, and they cannot meet to do any thing without having ſome place to do it in. Neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jeruſalem, means therefore excluſively,

ſively, with an idea of any peculiar ſacredneſs, or ſuperſtitious preference to any other ſtructure which might be equally commodious.

With regard to the character of our Saviour himſelf, it is certain he did not always call upon his diſciples to ſhare that more intimate, and, if I may ſay ſo, confidential, intercourſe with his heavenly Father, which he may be ſuppoſed to have been favoured with; and it muſt be confeſſed, there is no formal mention made of any exerciſes of this kind either with them, or with the people at large. But his whole life was a prayer. He, who in his moſt familiar and convivial moments, was raiſing the thoughts of his hearers to God, and nouriſhing their piety by occaſional inſtruction, could not be ſuppoſed to leave them diſinclined to the intercourſes of ſocial piety. The beautiful commendatory prayer which he offered up when about to leave the world, though it was not entirely of the nature of ſocial prayer, as his diſciples did not join in it, yet, its being

uttered

uttered in their preſence, and their being the object of it, ſeems to place it nearly on the ſame ground. In the very miracle of the loaves, which Mr. Wakefield has produced as an inſtance of an incident which might have given riſe to public prayer, and which was ſuffered to paſs without it —in the account of this very miracle there is a direct precedent for the practice in queſtion; for, looking up to heaven, he *bleſſed* before he brake the bread. This, indeed, appears to have been his conſtant practice. It certainly does not belong to private devotion, and is a ſpecies of prayer more apt, perhaps, than any other, to degenerate into a mere form.

But if we do not find Public Worſhip, properly ſo called, in the life of our Saviour, it is becauſe we look for it in the wrong place. It is not to be ſought for in his inſtructions, either to the multitude at large, or to his diſciples in their more private converſations. This public worſhip was paid where the reſt of the Jews paid theirs—in the Temple. He came up, with the concourſe

courſe of aſſembled multitudes, to the appointed religious feſtivals; he eat the paſſover, and aſſociated with his fellow citizens, even in thoſe rites and that form of worſhip which he knew was ſo ſoon to be aboliſhed.

Our Lord ſeems indeed to have been an early and regular frequenter of whatever public worſhip the Jews had among them. What this was, beſides their ſacrifices and ceremonial obſervances, Mr. Wakefield is infinitely better able than the author of theſe remarks, to collect from the volumes of Rabbinical learning; but, without going deeper into their antiquities than what may be gathered from thoſe records of their hiſtory which are in the hands of every one, it may be ſeen that verbal addreſſes to the Divine Being often accompanied the public expreſſions of their thankſgiving. In their earlieſt times we have the ſong of Moſes, in the burden of which the whole people, led by Miriam, joined in chorus. In a more poliſhed age, the fine prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the temple, a

compoſition

compoſition which has never been excelled, comes yet nearer to our ideas of an addreſs to the Divine Being; and the whole people bore a part in the worſhip by the reſponſe, "for he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever." A ſtill more regular ſervice is recorded by Nehemiah, when the people, after their return from the captivity, entered into that ſolemn renewal of their law deſcribed with ſo much affecting ſolemnity. *They ſtood* and *confeſſed their ſins*, then *they read the law*, after which the Levites called upon them *to ſtand up and bleſs the Lord their God*; they ſtood up accordingly, and joined in what I ſuppoſe the author of the Enquiry would call a pretty long prayer. And when *Ezra bleſſed the Lord*, the *people anſwered, Amen, Amen.* All this is ſufficiently ſimilar not only to the ſpirit, but to the very routine of our preſent modes of worſhip. If it be ſaid, that theſe inſtances all aroſe from peculiar and ſtriking occaſions, it may be anſwered, that it is not likely any other would be recorded; and that the regularity and grace with

with which they ſeem to have been performed, indicate a people not unaccuſtomed to ſuch exerciſes. Indeed the Pſalms of David afford every variety which any of our prayers do; confeſſion, aſcription, thankſgiving, &c. Theſe, it ſhould ſeem, were many of them ſet to muſic, and ſung with proper reſponſes; for even in the temple, the chief buſineſs of which was not prayer but ſacrifice, the Levites and other ſingers, at the time of the morning and evening ſacrifice, ſung pſalms of praiſe to God before the altar, and in the concluſion the prieſts bleſſed the people *. And it is not probable, that in a later period of their hiſtory, amidſt a greater degree of refinement and cultivation, they ſhould have contented themſelves with mere ritual obſervances. This at leaſt is evident, if in the time of our Saviour they had no worſhip ſimilar to ours, he could not mean by any thing he ſaid to hint a diſlike of it; and if they had, he muſt have ſanctioned the practice by conforming to it. But in-

* See Prideaux's Connection, Vol. II. p. 528.

deed

deed it is acknowledged by moſt, and Mr. Wakefield ſeems to admit, that after their return from the Babyloniſh captivity, when their hearts were purified by adverſity and more attached to their religion, they had regular and ſtated worſhip in their ſynagogues, conſiſting of forms of prayer, reading the ſcriptures, and expounding. In the former, we are told, a miniſter, called from his office the *angel* or *meſſenger of the church*, officiated as the mouth of the congregation; but for the latter part of the ſervice it was uſual to call upon any ſtranger to take his ſhare, who appeared to be ſufficiently qualified to read and expound the leſſons of the day. And hence probably it was, that our Saviour did not *pray* in the ſynagogues, though he often taught there, and interpreted the Scriptures *. Of their forms of prayer eighteen are given, held to be of high antiquity and peculiar ſacredneſs; and theſe are in a ſtrain not diſſimilar to the Liturgies of more modern times. In ſhort, if we trace the accounts given us

* See Prideaux's Connection, Vol. II. p. 538.

both

both of the plan of the ſervice, and of its preſbyters, miniſters, and deacons, it will be found, that the Chriſtian church, in its correſponding officers, its collects, litanies, and expoſitions, is the legitimate daughter of the Jewiſh ſynagogue; and we ſhall be led to admire the ſingular fate of a nation, decreed to be at once imitated and deſpiſed.

Thus much may be ſufficient to ſay upon a ſubject which, after all, is purely a queſtion of hiſtorical curioſity.

To return to the character of our Saviour. His great buſineſs in the world was inſtruction; and this he diſpenſed, not in a ſyſtematic, but a popular manner; nor yet in a vague and declamatory ſtile, but in a pointed and appropriated one; not where it would moſt ſhine, but where it was moſt wanted. He was the great reformer, the innovator of his day; and the ſtrain of his energetic eloquence was ſtrongly pointed againſt abuſes of all kinds, and preciſely thoſe points of duty were moſt inſiſted on which he found moſt neglected. Almoſt all his diſcourſes are levelled againſt ſome

prevailing

prevailing vice of the times, ſome faſhionable worldly maxim, ſome artful gloſs of a well known precept, ſome evaſion of an acknowledged duty. They were delivered as occaſion prompted, and therefore it was that they came ſo home to men's buſineſs and boſoms; for he might have delivered the moſt elaborate lectures on morality, and religion too, without offending the Scribes and Phariſees, if he had confined himſelf to ſyſtem, and not attacked corruption. We ſhall therefore meet with continual diſappointment if, in the few ſcattered diſcourſes, moſt of them too converſations, which are preſerved to us of our Saviour, we expect to find any thing like a regular code of laws, and ſtill leſs a formulary of rules. He referred to known laws, and only endeavoured to reſtore the ſpirit of them, and to exalt the motive of obedience. The great duty of honouring our parents had probably not found a place in his inſtructions, but to expoſe the *tradition* which had *made it of none effect*. It is therefore a very inconcluſive argument againſt

againſt a practice either; that we are not expreſsly enjoined it in the goſpel, or that the abuſes of it are ſtrongly dwelt upon; and this may ſerve for a general anſwer to Mr. Wakefield's objections built upon the animated denunciations againſt thoſe who, for a pretence, make long prayers, and who cry, Lord, Lord,—againſt vain repetitions—upon the exhortations to worſhip in ſpirit and in truth—the declaration that the Sabbath is made for man, and not man for the Sabbath—with a thouſand others in the ſame ſtrain, with which the goſpel undoubtedly abounds. But is the utility of a practice deſtroyed by the abuſe of it, or is it of none, becauſe it is not of the chief value? Are none of our duties ſubordinate, yet real? or have they all the proud motto, *Aut Cæſar aut nullus*.—As to the idea of a *progreſſive Chriſtianity*, on which the author of the Enquiry lays ſo much ſtreſs, as no new revelation has been pretended ſubſequent to its original promulgation, it is difficult to conceive of any progreſs in it, diſtinct from the progreſs of

reaſon and civilization in the different countries where it may be received. Now I do not know what right we have to ſuppoſe that the Jews in the time of our Saviour, were ſo groſs in their ideas as to require a mode of worſhip which deſerves to be ſtigmatized with the appellation of *beggarly elements* and the *twilight of ſuperſtition.* They were probably as different from their countrymen in the time of the Judges, as we are from our anceſtors of the Saxon heptarchy. They had long had among them moſt of thoſe cauſes which tend to develop the mental powers. A ſyſtem of laws and polity, writers of the moſt diſtinguiſhed excellence, commercial and political intercourſe with other nations; they had acute and ſubtle diſputants, and an acquaintance with different ſects of philoſophy; and, under theſe circumſtances, it is probable that moſt of thoſe queſtions would be agitated which, at ſimilar periods, have exerciſed and perplexed the human faculties. Be that as it may, Mr. Wakefield, by conſidering public worſhip as a practice

practice to be adapted to the *exigencies of the times*, evidently abandons the textual ground, in which narrow path he ſeemed hitherto to have trod with ſuch ſcrupulous precaution, and places it on the broader footing of utility. The *utility* of this practice therefore comes next to be conſidered.

It is an error, which is extremely incident to minds of a delicate and anxious ſenſibility, to ſuppoſe that practices do no good which do not all the good that might be expected from them. Let thoſe who, in a deſponding mood, are apt to think thus of public worſhip, calculate, if they can, what would be the conſequence if it were laid aſide. Perhaps it is not eaſy to eſtimate how much of the manners as well as the morals—how much of the cultivation as well as the religion of a people are derived from this very ſource. If a legiſlator or philoſopher were to undertake the civilization of a horde of wild ſavages, ſcattered along the waſte in the drear lonelineſs of individual exiſtence, and averſe to the faces of each other—if he had formed

a plan to gather them together, and give them a principle of coheſion; he probably could not take a more effectual method than by perſuading them to meet together in one place—at regular and ſtated times—and there to join together in a common act, impoſing from its ſolemnity and endearing from the ſocial nature of its exercifes. If an adventurer were ſtranded on ſome foreign ſhore, and ſhould find the inhabitants engaged in ſuch an act, he might draw the concluſion, that the bleſſings of order, internal peace, mutual confidence, and a conſiderable degree of information, exiſted there, as ſurely as the philoſopher drew a ſimilar inference from the diſcovery of mathematical diagrams traced upon the ſand. And thus, in fact, it was, that in the early beginnings of ſociety, legiſlators called in the aſſiſtance of religious ideas, and with the charm and melody of ſolemn hymns, like thoſe of Orpheus or of Linus, gathered round them the ſtupid, incurious barbarians, rouſed them to attention and ſoftened into docility. Agreeably to this train of

thinking, our great dramatic moraliſt places the influences of ſocial worſhip upon a par with the ſacred touches of ſympathetic ſorrow, and the exhilarating pleaſures of the hoſpitable board, and makes it one of the features which diſtinguiſh the urbanity of poliſhed life from the rude and unfeeling ferocity which belongs to a clan of unprincipled banditti.

If ever you have looked on better days,
If ever been where bells have knolled to church,
If ever ſate at any good man's feaſt,
If ever from your eye-lids wiped a tear,
And known what 'tis to pity and be pitied;
Let gentleneſs your ſtrong enforcement be——
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For, independent of the peculiar object of public religious aſſemblies, many collateral advantages are derived from them which the liberal thinker will by no means deſpiſe. The recurrence of appointed days of reſt and leiſure, which, but for this purpoſe, would never have been appointed, divides the weary months of labour and ſervitude with a ſeparating line of a brighter colour. The church is a centre of union for neighbours,

 friends,

friends, and townſmen ; and it is a reaſonable and a pleaſing ground of preference in our attachments, that we have " walked to the houſe of God in company." Even the common greetings that paſs between thoſe who meet there, are hallowed by the occaſion of the meeting, and the ſpirit of civic urbanity is mingled with a ſtill ſweeter infuſion of chriſtian courteſy. By the recurrence of this intercourſe, feuds and animoſities are compoſed, which interrupted the harmony of friends and acquaintance; and thoſe who avoided to meet becauſe they could not forgive, are led to forgive, being obliged to meet. Its effect in humanizing the lower orders of ſociety, and faſhioning their manners to the order and decorum of civil life, is apparent to every reflecting mind. The poor who have not formed a habit of attending here, remain from week to week in their ſordid cells, or iſſue thence to places of licentiouſneſs more ſordid; while thoſe who aſſemble with the other inhabitants of the place, are brought into the frequent

view

view of their ſuperiors; their perſons are known, their appearance noted; the enquiring eye of benevolence purſues them to their humble cottages, and they are not unfrequently led home from ſocial worſhip to the ſocial meal. If the rich and poor were but thus brought together regularly and univerſally, that ſingle circumſtance would be found ſufficient to remove the ſqualidneſs of miſery, and the bitterneſs of want; and poverty would exiſt only as a ſober ſhade in the picture of life, on which the benevolent eye might reſt with a degree of complacency when fatigued with the more gaudy colouring of luxury and ſhow.

The good effect of public worſhip in this light is remarkably conſpicuous in the Sunday ſchools. Many of the children who attend, have probably not very clearly comprehended any religious ſyſtem; but the moving and acting under the public eye, together with a ſenſe of duty and moral obligation, which, however obſcure, always accompanies the exerciſes of religion, ſoon transforms them into a different kind

of beings. They acquire a love of neatneſs and regularity; a ſenſe of propriety inſinuates itſelf into their young minds, and produces, inſtead of the ſullen and untamed licentiouſneſs, which at once ſhuns and hates the reſtraints of better life, the modeſt deference and chaſtened demeanour of thoſe who reſpect others becauſe they reſpect themſelves.

Public Worſhip conveys a great deal of inſtruction in an indirect manner. Even thoſe didactic prayers which run out into the enumeration of the attributes of the divine Being, and of the duties of a virtuous life, though, perhaps, not ſtrictly proper as prayer, have their uſe in ſtoring the minds of the generality with ideas on theſe important ſubjects; and the beauty and ſublimity of many of theſe compoſitions muſt operate powerfully in lifting the heart to God, and inſpiring it with a love of virtue. Improper as public prayers may have ſometimes been, private prayers are likely to be ſtill more ſo. Whatever contempt Mr. Wakefield may chooſe to throw on the official

official abilities of thoſe who lead the ſervice, it will not be denied that they are generally better informed than thoſe who follow. Men to whom ſpiritual ideas are familiar from reading and ſtudy, do not ſufficiently appreciate the advantage which the illiterate enjoy by the fellowſhip and communication of ſuperior minds, who are qualified to lead their ideas in the right track.

Public Worſhip is a means of invigorating faith. Though argument be one means of generating belief, and that on which all belief muſt ultimately reſt, it is not the only means, nor, with many minds, the moſt efficacious. Practical faith is greatly aſſiſted by joining in ſome act in which the preſence and perſuaſion of others gives a ſort of reality to our perception of inviſible things. The metaphyſical reaſoner, entangled in the nets of ſophiſtry, may involve himſelf in the intricacies of contradictory ſyllogiſms till reaſon grows giddy, and ſcarcely able to hold the balance; but when he acts in preſence of his fellow-

creatures,

creatures, his mind reſumes its tone and vigour, and ſocial devotion gives a colour and body to the deductions of his reaſon. Berkeley, probably, never doubted of the exiſtence of the material world when he had quitted his cloſet. Some minds are not capable of that firmneſs of deciſion which embraces truth upon a bare preponderancy of argument—ſome, through a timorous and melancholy ſpirit, remain always in a perplexed and doubting ſtate, if they reſt merely on the concluſions built upon their own inveſtigation. But every act in conſequence of our faith, ſtrengthens faith. Theſe, when they enter a place of worſhip, amidſt all the animating accompaniments of ſocial homage, are ſeized with a happy contagion; ſlow heſitating doubts vaniſh in a moment, and give way to ſincere and cordial feeling. Theſe are not proofs, it is true; but they are helps, adapted to our nature, neceſſary to the generality, expedient for all. As for the multitude, ſo unaccuſtomed are they to any proceſs of abſtruſe reaſoning, and ſo much

much do they require the aſſiſtance of ſome object within the graſp of their ſenſes, that it is to be doubted whether they could be at all perſuaded of the exiſtence of a ſpiritual inviſible power, if that exiſtence was not ſtatedly acknowledged by ſome act which ſhould impreſs the reality of it upon their minds, by connecting it with places, perſons, and times.

Let it be obſerved, in the next place, that Public Worſhip is a *civic* meeting. The temple is the only place where human beings, of every rank and ſex and age, meet together for one common purpoſe, and join together in one common act. Other meetings are either political, or formed for the purpoſes of ſplendor and amuſement; from both which, in this country, the bulk of inhabitants are of neceſſity excluded. This is the only place, to enter which nothing more is neceſſary than to be of the ſame ſpecies;—the only place where man meets man not only as an equal but a brother; and where, by contemplating his duties, he may become ſenſible of his rights. So high

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and haughty is the ſpirit of ariſtocracy, and ſuch the increaſing pride of the privileged claſſes, that it is to be feared, if men did not attend at the ſame place here, it would hardly be believed they were meant to go to the ſame place hereafter. It is of ſervice to the cauſe of freedom therefore, no leſs than to that of virtue, that there is one place where the invidious diſtinctions of wealth and titles are not admitted; where all are equal, not by making the low, proud, but by making the great, humble. How many a man exiſts who poſſeſſes not the ſmalleſt property in this earth of which you call him lord; who, from the narrowing ſpirit of property, is circumſcribed and hemmed in by the poſſeſſions of his more opulent neighbours, till there is ſcarcely an unoccupied ſpot of verdure on which he can ſet his foot to admire the beauties of nature, or barren mountain on which he can draw the freſh air without a treſpaſs. The enjoyments of life are for others, the labours of it for him. He hears thoſe of his claſs ſpoken of collectively, as of machines,

chines, which are to be kept in repair indeed, but of which the ſole uſe is to raiſe the happineſs of the higher orders. Where, but in the temples of religion, ſhall he learn that he is of the ſame ſpecies? He hears there (and were it for the firſt time, it would be with infinite aſtoniſhment) that all are conſidered as alike ignorant and to be inſtructed; all alike ſinful and needing forgiveneſs; all alike bound by the ſame obligations, and animated by the ſame hopes. In the intercourſes of the world the poor man is ſeen, but not noticed; he may be in the preſence of his ſuperiors, but he cannot be in their company. In every other place it would be preſumption in him to let his voice be heard along with theirs; here alone they are both raiſed together, and blended in the full chorus of praiſe. In every other place it would be an offence to be near them, without ſhewing in his attitudes and deportment the conſcious marks of inferiority; here only he ſees the proſtrations of the rich as low as his, and hears them both addreſſed together

gether in the majeſtic ſimplicity of a language that knows no adulation. Here the poor man learns that, in ſpite of the diſtinctions of rank, and the apparent inferiority of his condition, all the true goods of life, all that men dare petition for when in the preſence of their Maker—a ſound mind, a healthful body, and daily bread, lie within the ſcope of his own hopes and endeavours; and that in the large inheritance to come, his expectations are no leſs ample than theirs. He riſes from his knees, and feels himſelf a man. He learns philoſophy without its pride, and a ſpirit of liberty without its turbulence. Every time Social Worſhip is celebrated, it includes a virtual declaration of the rights of man.

It may be further obſerved, that the regular ſervices of the church are to us the more neceſſary, as we have laid aſide many of thoſe modes and expreſſions which gave a tincture of religion to our ſocial intercourſe and domeſtic manners. The regard to particular days and ſeaſons is nearly worn off.

off. The forms of epiſtolary correſpondence, and the friendly ſalutations which, in the laſt century, breathed a ſpirit of affectionate piety, are exchanged for the degrading ceremonial of unmeaning ſervility. The *God be with you—God bleſs you—If God permit—Heaven have you in its keeping*,—like the graceful *Salam*, or ſalutation of peace among the eaſtern nations, kept up in the mind a ſenſe of the ſurrounding providence of the Divine Being, and might, in ſome meaſure, ſuperſede the neceſſity of more formal addreſſes; whereas, in the preſent ſtate of ſociety, a ſtranger might paſs day after day, and week after week, in the boſom of a Chriſtian country, without ſuſpecting the faith of its inhabitants (if Public Worſhip were laid aſide) from any circumſtance, unleſs it were the obſcure, half-pronounced bleſſing which is ſtill ſometimes murmured over the table.

Let it therefore be conſidered, when the length and abſtracted nature of our public prayers is objected to, that we have nothing to take their place. If our attention

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was excited by proceſſions, garlands, altars, and ſacrifices, and every action of our lives intermixed with ſome religious rite, theſe expreſſions of our homage might be more readily diſpenſed with; but in reality, tedious as Mr. Wakefield may think long prayers, they ſuit better with the gravity of the national diſpoſition and the philoſophic turn of our ideas, than any ſubſtitute which could be ſuggeſted by the moſt claſſic taſte. Our prayers are become long, becauſe our ceremonies are ſhort.

If we may ſuppoſe theſe views of the ſubject to have eſtabliſhed the general utility of Public Worſhip, a queſtion ſtill ariſes, Is the obligation to it univerſal? Is attendance on its exercifes to be expected from thoſe whoſe own minds are temples more hallowed than any they can enter; and whoſe knowledge and cultivation render it probable, that in every popular ſervice they will meet with much to object to, and little to intereſt a taſte rendered faſtidious by critical accuracy and elegant refinement? Without preſuming to condemn the conduct of thoſe who are in every reſpect ſo

competent

competent to form their own plans according to their own judgment, I would mention ſome conſiderations which, even to them, may preſent it in a light not unworthy their attention. It is, in the firſt place, an act of homage, and as ſuch equally incumbent on all. It is a profeſſion of faith, leſs dubious even than the performance of moral duties, which may proceed from a well directed prudence, or the harmony of a happy temperament. It is right and proper that Religion ſhould have the honour of thoſe who are calculated to do her honour. It is likewiſe uſeful for a pious man to be connected with pious people as ſuch. Various aſſociations are formed upon the ground of ſomething which men wiſh to improve or to enjoy in common. Literary men aſſociate, muſical men aſſociate, political men aſſociate together; and as there is a great deal of the commerce of the world in which it would be impoſſible to introduce religion, there ought by way of balance to be ſome ſociety of which that is the ground and principle; other-

wiſe, from the very nature of our connections with each other, we ſhall find religion leſs in our thoughts than almoſt any thing elſe in which we have an intereſt, and inſenſibly it will waſte and die away for mere want of aliment. But the attendance of men of literature and knowledge is perhaps moſt important from its effect upon others. The unenlightened worſhip with moſt pleaſure, where thoſe worſhip whoſe opinions they reſpect. A religion that is left for the vulgar will not long ſatisfy even them. There is harſhneſs in ſaying to the bulk of mankind, Stand aſide, we are wiſer than you. There is harſhneſs in ſaying, Our affections cannot move in concert; what edifies you diſguſts us; we cannot feel in common, even where we have a common intereſt. In the intercourſes of life, the man of urbanity makes a thouſand ſacrifices to the conciliating ſpirit of courteſy, and the ſcience of attentions. The exerciſes of devotion, Mr. Wakefield ſays, are wearifome. Suppoſe they were ſo, how many meetings do

we frequent, to how many converſations do we liſten with benevolent attention, where our own pleaſure and our own improvement are not the objects to which our time is given up? He who knows much, muſt expect to be often preſent where he can learn nothing. While others are receiving information, he is practiſing a virtue. He, who in common life has learned to mix a regard to the feelings and opinions of others with the purſuit of his own gratifications, will bear, in the ſpirit of love and charity, the inſtruction which to him is unneceſſary, the amplification which to him is tireſome, the deficiencies of method or of elocution, to which his ear and his judgment are acutely ſenſible; the imperfections, in ſhort, of men or of ſocieties inferior to himſelf in taſte or knowledge;—as in converſation he bears with the communicative overflowings of ſelf-importance, the repetition of the well known tale, and the recurrence of the numerous, burdenſome forms of civilized ſociety.

It becomes us well to conſider what

would be the conſequence, if the deſertion of men of ſuperior ſenſe ſhould become general in our aſſemblies. Not the abolition of public worſhip; it is a practice too deeply rooted in the very propenſities of our nature; but this would be the conſequence, that it would be thrown into the hands of profeſſional men on the one hand, and of uninformed men on the other. By the one it would be corrupted, it would be debaſed by the other. Let the friends of moderation and good ſenſe conſider whether it is deſirable, whether it is even ſafe, to withdraw from the public the powerful influence of their taſte, knowledge, and liberality. Let them conſider whether they are prepared to take the conſequences of truſting in the hands of any clergy, ſo powerful an engine as that of public worſhip and inſtruction, without the ſalutary check of *their* preſence who are beſt able to diſtinguiſh truth from falſehood, to detect unwarrantable pretenſions, and to keep within tolerable bounds the wanderings of fanaticiſm. Attentive to the ſigns of the times,

times, they will have remarked, on the one hand, a diſpoſition to give into deception, greater than might naturally have been preſumed of this age, which we compliment with the epithet of enlightened. Empiric extravagancies have been adopted, which violate every ſober and conſiſtent idea of the laws of nature, and new ſects have ſprung up diſtinguiſhed by the wildeſt reveries of viſionary credulity. On the other, they will have obſerved indications of a deſire to diſcourage the freedom of inveſtigation, to thicken the veil of myſtery, and to revive every obſolete pretenſion of prieſtly power, which, in the moſt ignorant periods, the haughtieſt churchman has ever dared to aſſume. They will have read with aſtoniſhment an official exhortation to the inferior clergy—it was not fulminated from the Vatican, it was not dragged to light from the mould and ruſt of remote ages—It was delivered by an Engliſh divine of the eighteenth century, brilliant in parts and high in place: he knew it was to meet the notice and encounter the criticiſm of an

enlightened and philoſophic people, and he has not ſcrupled to tell them—that *good works of a heretic are ſin*; and that ſuch a one may go to hell *with his load of moral merit on his back.* He has not ſcrupled to rank the firſt philoſopher of this kingdom, and the man in it perhaps of all others moſt actively ſolicitous for the ſpread of what he at leaſt believes to be genuine Chriſtianity, with infidels and atheiſts; and thus by obvious inference has piouſly conſigned him to the ſame doom. He has revived claims and opinions which have upon their heads whole centuries of oblivion and contempt; and by ſlandering Morality, has thought to exalt Religion.—Reflecting on theſe things, they will conſider whether the man of judgment does not deſert the poſt aſſigned him by Providence, when he withdraws from popular aſſemblies both the countenance of his example and the impoſing awe of his preſence; they will conceive themſelves as inveſted with the high commiſſion to take care *nequid reſpublica detrimenti capiat*; they will conſider

der themſelves as the ſalt of the earth, the leaven of the lump, not to be ſecluded in ſeparate parcels, but to be mingled in the whole maſs, diffuſing through it their own ſpirit and ſavour.

The author of the Enquiry chooſes to expatiate, it is not difficult to do it, on the diſcordant variety of the different modes of worſhip practiſed amongſt men, and concludes it with characterizing this alarming ſchiſm by the compariſon of the poet:

> One likes the pheaſant's wing, and one the leg;
> The vulgar boil, the learned roaſt an egg.

But might we not venture to aſk,—Where, pray, is the harm of all this? unleſs indeed I will not allow my neighbour to boil his egg becauſe I roaſt mine. Eggs are good and nutritious food either way; and in the manner of dreſſing them, fancy and taſte, nay caprice, if you will, may fairly be conſulted. If I prefer the leg of a pheaſant, and my neighbour finds it dry, let each take what he likes. It would be a concluſion ſingularly abſurd that eggs and

pheaſants were not to be eaten. All the harm is in having but one table for gueſts of every deſcription; and yet even there, were I at a public ordinary, good in other reſpects, I would rather conform my taſte in ſome meaſure to that of my neighbour, than be reduced to the melancholy neceſſity of eating my morſel by myſelf alone.

The Diſſenters cannot be ſuppoſed to paſs over in ſilence Mr. Wakefield's ſtrictures upon the manner in which *they* have choſen to conduct their public and ſocial worſhip. They are ſurpriſed and ſorry to find themſelves treated with ſuch a mixture of bitterneſs and levity by a man whoſe abilities they reſpect, and whom they have ſhewn themſelves ready to embrace as a brother. They have their prejudices, they acknowledge—and he perhaps has his. Many forms and obſervances may to them be dear and venerable, through the force of early habit and aſſociation, which to a ſtranger in their Iſrael may appear uncouth, unneceſſary, or even marked with a ſhade of ridicule. They

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pity Mr. Wakefield's peculiar and inſulated ſituation. Separating through the pureſt motives from one church, he has not found another with which he is inclined to aſſociate; divided by difference of opinions from one claſs of Chriſtians, and by diſſonance of taſte from another, he finds the tranſition too violent from the college to the conventicle; he worſhips alone becauſe he ſtands alone; and is, naturally perhaps, led to undervalue that fellowſhip which has been loſt to him between his early predilections and his later opinions. If, however, the Diſſenters are not ſo happy as to gain his affection, they muſt be allowed to urge their claims upon his eſteem. They wiſh him to reflect, that neither his claſſical knowledge, nor his critical acumen, nor his acknowledged talents, ſet him ſo high in the eſteem of good men, as that integrity which he poſſeſſes in common with thoſe whom he deſpiſes; they believe further conſideration would ſuggeſt to him, that it were more candid to paſs over thoſe peculiarities

ties which have originated in a delicate conſcience and the fervour of devotion; and they cannot help aſking, Whether they had reaſon to expect the ſeverity of ſarcaſtic ridicule from him, whoſe beſt praiſe it is that he has imitated their virtues and ſhared their ſacrifices?

The Diſſenters, however, do not make it their boaſt that they have nothing to reform. They have, perhaps, always been more conſpicuous for principle than for taſte; their practices are founded upon a prevalence of religious fervour, an animation and warmth of piety, which, if it no longer exiſts, it is vain to ſimulate. But what they do make their boaſt is, that they acknowledge no principle which forbids them to reform; that they have no leave to aſk of Biſhops, Synods, or Parliaments, in order to lay aſide forms which have become vapid. They are open to conviction; they are ready to receive with thankfulneſs every *ſober* and *liberal* remark which may aſſiſt them to improve their religious addreſſes, and model them to the temper of

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the public mind. But, with regard to those practices of superabundant devotion which have drawn down upon them the indignation of the critic, it is the opinion of those who best know the Dissenters of the present day, that they might have been suffered to fall quietly of themselves: they are supported by no authority, defrayed by no impost. If they make long prayers, it is at the expence only of their own breath and spirits; no widows' houses are devoured by it. If the present generation *yawn* and *slumber* over the exercises which their fathers attended with pious alacrity, the sons will of course learn to shorten them. If the disposition of their public services wants animation, as perhaps it does, the silent pews will be deserted one by one, and they will be obliged to seek some other mode of engaging the attention of their audience. But modes and forms affect not the essence of Public Worship; that may be performed with a form or without one; by words alone, or by symbolical expressions, combined with or separated

rated from inſtruction; with or without the aſſiſtance of a particular order appointed to officiate in leading the devotions: it may be celebrated one day in ſeven, or in eight, or in ten: in many of theſe particulars a certain deference ſhould be had to the ſentiments of that ſociety with which, upon the whole, we think it beſt to connect ourſelves, and as times and manners change, theſe circumſtances will vary; but the root of the practice is too ſtrongly interwoven with the texture of the human frame ever to be abandoned. While man has wants, he will pray; while he is ſenſible of bleſſings, he will offer praiſe; while he has common wants and common bleſſings, he will pray and praiſe in company with his fellows; and while he feels himſelf a ſocial being, he will not be perſuaded to lay aſide Social Worſhip.

It muſt, however, be acknowledged, that, in order to give Public Worſhip all the grace and efficacy of which it is ſuſceptible, much alteration is neceſſary. It is neceſſary here, as in every other concern, that timely reformation

formation ſhould prevent neglect. Much might be done by judgment, taſte, and a devotional ſpirit united, to improve the plan of our religious aſſemblies. Should a genius ariſe amongſt us qualified for ſuch a taſk, and in circumſtances favourable to his being liſtened to, he would probably remark firſt, on the conſtruction of our churches, ſo ill adapted are a great part of them to the purpoſes either of hearing or ſeeing. He would reprobate thoſe little gloomy ſolitary cells, planned by the ſpirit of ariſtocracy, which deform the building no leſs to the eye of taſte than to the eye of benevolence, and inſulating each family within its ſeparate incloſure, favour at once the pride of rank and the lazineſs of indulgence. He might chooſe for theſe ſtructures ſomething of the amphitheatrical form, where the miniſter, on a raiſed platform, ſhould be beheld with eaſe by the whole wave of people, at once bending together in deep humiliation, or ſpreading forth their hands in the earneſtneſs of petition. It would certainly be found deſir-

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able that the people ſhould themſelves have a large ſhare in the performance of the ſervice, as the intermixture of their voices would both introduce more variety and greater animation; provided pains were taken by proper teaching to enable them to bear their part with a decorum and propriety, which, it muſt be confeſſed, we do not ſee at preſent amongſt thoſe whoſe public ſervices poſſeſs the advantage of reſponſes. The explaining, and teaching them to recite, ſuch hymns and collects as it might be thought proper they ſhould bear a part in, would form a pleaſing and uſeful branch of the inſtruction of young people, and of the lower claſſes; it would give them an intereſt in the public ſervice, and might fill up agreeably a vacant hour either on the Sunday or on ſome other leiſure day, eſpecially if they were likewiſe regularly inſtructed in ſinging for the ſame purpoſe. As we have never ſeen, perhaps we can hardly conceive, the effect which the united voices of a whole congregation, all in the lively expreſſion of one feeling, would

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have upon the mind. We ſhould then perceive not only that we were doing the ſame thing in the ſame place, but that we were doing it with one accord. The deep ſilence of liſtening expectation, the burſt of united praiſes, the ſolemn pauſes that invite reflection, the varied tones of humiliation, gratitude, or perſuaſion, would ſwell and melt the heart by turns; nor would there be any reaſon to guard againſt the wandering eye, when every object it reſted on muſt forcibly recall it to the duties of the place.—Poſſibly it might be found expedient to ſeparate worſhip from inſtruction; the learned teacher from the leader of the public devotions, in whom voice, and popular talents, might perhaps be allowed to ſuperſede a more deep and critical acquaintance with the doctrines of theology. One conſequence, at leaſt, would follow ſuch a ſeparation, that inſtruction would be given more ſyſtematically.——Nothing that is taught at all is taught in ſo vague and deſultory a manner as the doctrines of religion. A congregation may attend for

years

years, even a good preacher, and never hear the evidences of either natural or revealed religion regularly explained to them: they may attend for years, and never hear a connected ſyſtem of moral duties extending to the different ſituations and relations of life: they may attend for years, and not even gain any clear idea of the hiſtory and chronology of the Old and New Teſtament, which are read to them every Sunday. They will hear abundance of excellent doctrine, and will often feel their hearts warmed and their minds edified; but their ideas upon theſe ſubjects will be confuſed and imperfect, becauſe they are treated on in a manner ſo totally different from every thing elſe which bears the name of inſtruction. This is probably owing, in a great meaſure, to the cuſtom of prefixing to every pulpit diſcourſe a ſenſence, taken indiſcriminately from any part of the Scriptures, under the name of a text, which at firſt implying an expoſition, was afterwards uſed to ſuggeſt a ſubject, and is now, by degrees, dwindling into a motto.—Still, however,

however, the cuſtom ſubſiſts; and while it ſerves to ſuperſede a more methodical courſe of inſtruction, tends to keep up in the minds of the generality of hearers a very ſuperſtitious idea, not now entertained, it is to be preſumed, by the generality of thoſe who teach, of the equal ſacredneſs and importance of every part of ſo miſcellaneous a collection.

If theſe inſulated diſcourſes, of which each is complete in itſelf, and therefore can have but little compaſs, were digeſted into a regular plan of lectures, ſupported by a courſe of reading, to which the audience might be directed, it would have the further advantage of rouſing the inattentive and reſtraining the rambling hearer by the intereſt which would be created by ſuch a connected ſeries of information. They would occupy a larger ſpace in the mind, they would more frequently be the ſubject of recollection and meditation; there would be a fear of miſſing one link in ſuch a chain of truths, and the more intelligent part of a congregation might find a uſeful and intereſting

employment in aſſiſting the teacher in the inſtruction of thoſe who were not able to comprehend inſtruction with the ſame facility as themſelves. When ſuch a courſe of inſtruction had been delivered, it would not be expected that diſcourſes, into which men of genius and learning had digeſted their beſt thoughts, ſhould be thrown by, or brought forward again, as it were, by ſtealth; but they would be regularly and avowedly repeated at proper intervals. It is uſual upon the continent for a ſet of ſermons to be delivered in ſeveral churches, each of which has its officiating miniſter for the ſtated public worſhip; and thus a whole diſtrict partakes the advantage of the labours of a man eminent for compoſition. Perhaps it might be deſirable to join to religious information ſome inſtruction in the laws of our country, which are, or ought to be, founded upon morals; and which, by a ſtrange ſoleciſm, are obligatory upon all, and ſcarcely promulgated, much leſs explained.—Many ideas will offer themſelves to a thinking man, who

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wiſhes not to aboliſh, but to improve the Public Worſhip of his country. Theſe are only hints, offered with diffidence and reſpect, to thoſe who are able to judge of and carry them into effect.

Above all, it would be deſirable to ſeparate from religion that idea of gloom which in this country has but too generally accompanied it. The fact cannot be denied; the cauſe muſt be ſought, partly in our national character, which I am afraid is not naturally either very cheerful or very ſocial, and which we ſhall do well to meliorate by every poſſible attention to our habits of life;—and partly to the colour of our religious ſyſtems. No one who embraces the common idea of future torments, together with the doctrine of election and reprobation, the inſufficiency of virtue to eſcape the *wrath* of God, and the ſtrange abſurdity which, it ſhould ſeem, through ſimilarity of ſound alone has been admitted as an axiom, that ſins committed againſt an Infinite Being do therefore deſerve infinite puniſhment—no one, I will venture

to assert, can believe such tenets, and have them often in his thoughts, and yet be cheerful. Whence a system has arisen so incompatible with that justice and benevolence, which in the discourses of our Saviour are represented as the most essential attributes of the Divine Being, is not easy to trace. It is probable, however, that *power*, being the most prominent feature in our conceptions of the Creator, and that of which we see the most striking image here on earth (there being a greater portion of uncontrouled power than of unmixed wisdom or goodness to be found amongst human beings), the Deity would naturally be likened to an absolute monarch;—and most absolute monarchs having been tyrants, jealous of their sovereignty, averse to freedom of investigation, ordering affairs, not with a view to the happiness of their subjects, but to the advancement of their own glory; not to be approached but with rich gifts and offerings; bestowing favours, not in proportion to merit, but from the pure influence of caprice

price and blind partiality; to thoſe who have offended them ſevere, and unforgiving, except induced to pardon by the importunate interceſſion of ſome favourite; confining their enemies, when they had overcome them, after a conteſt, in deep, dark dungeons under ground, or putting them to death in the prolonged miſery of excruciating tortures—theſe features of human depravity have been moſt faithfully tranſferred to the Supreme Being; and men have imaged to themſelves how a Nero or a Domitian would have acted, if, from the extent of their dominion there had been no eſcape, and to the duration of it no period.

Theſe ideas of the vulgar belief, terrible, but as yet vague and undefined, paſſed into the ſpeculations of the ſchoolmen, by whom they were combined with the metaphyſical idea of eternity, arranged in ſpecific propoſitions, fixed in creeds, and elaborated into ſyſtems, till at length they have been ſublimed into all the tremendous horrors of the Calviniſtic faith. Theſe doctrines, it is true, among thinking peo-

ple, are loſing ground; but there is ſtill apparent, in that claſs called ſerious Chriſtians, a tenderneſs in expoſing them; a ſort of leaning towards them, as in walking over a precipice one ſhould lean to the ſafeſt ſide; an idea that they are, if not true, at leaſt good to be believed, and that a ſalutary error is better than a dangerous truth. But that error can neither be ſalutary nor harmleſs, which attributes to the Deity injuſtice and cruelty; and that religion muſt have the worſt of tendencies, which renders it dangerous for man to imitate the being whom he worſhips. Let thoſe who hold ſuch tenets conſider, that the inviſible Creator has no name, and is identified only by his character; and they will tremble to think *what* being they are worſhipping, when they invoke a power capable of producing exiſtence, in order to continue it in never ending torments. The God of the Aſſembly's Catechiſm is not the *ſame* God with the deity of Thomſon's Seaſons, and of Hutcheſon's Ethics. Unity of character in what we adore, is much

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more eſſential than unity of perſon. We often boaſt, and with reaſon, of the purity of our religion, as oppoſed to the groſſneſs of the theology of the Greeks and Romans; but we ſhould remember, that cruelty is as much worſe than licentiouſneſs, as a Moloch is worſe than a ſatyr.—When will Chriſtians permit themſelves to believe that the ſame conduct which gains them the approbation of good men here, will ſecure the favour of heaven hereafter? When will they ceaſe making their court to their Maker by the ſame ſervile debaſement and affectation of lowlineſs by which the vain potentates of the earth are flattered? When a harmleſs and well meaning man, in the exaggerated figures of theological rhetoric, calls himſelf the vileſt of ſinners, it is in preciſely the ſame ſpirit of falſe humility in which the courtier uſes degrading and diſqualifying expreſſions, when he ſpeaks of himſelf in his adulatory addreſſes to his ſovereign. When a good man draws near the cloſe of a life, not free indeed from faults, but pure from crime, a life ſpent

in the habitual exercise of all those virtues which adorn and dignify human nature, and in the uniform approach to that perfection, which is confessedly unattainable in this imperfect state,—when a man—perhaps like Dr. Price, whose name will be ever pronounced with affectionate veneration and deep regard by all the friends of philosophy, virtue, and mankind, — is about to resign his soul into the hands of his Maker, he ought to do it, not only with a reliance on his mercy, but his justice; a generous confidence and pious resignation should be blended in his deportment. It does not become him to pay the blasphemous homage of deprecating the wrath of God, when he ought to throw himself into the arms of his love. He is not to think that virtue is one thing here, and another in heaven; or that he on whom blessings and eulogiums are ready to burst from all honest tongues, can be an object of punishment with him who is infinitely more benevolent than any of his creatures.

These remarks may be thought foreign

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to the ſubject in queſtion; but in fact they are not ſo. Public Worſhip will be tinctured with gloom, while our ideas of its object are darkened by ſuperſtition; it will be infected with hypocriſy, while its profeſſions and tenets run counter to the genuine, unperverted moral ſenſe of mankind; it will not meet the countenance of philoſophers ſo long as we are obliged to unlearn our ethics, in order to learn divinity. Let it be conſidered that theſe opinions greatly favour immorality. The doctrine that all are vile, and equally merit a ſtate of puniſhment, is an idea as conſolatory to the profligate, as it is humiliating to the ſaint; and that is one reaſon why it has always been a favourite doctrine. The indecent confidence of a Dodd*, and the debaſing terrors of a Johnſon, or of more blameleſs men

* 'And admitted, as I truſt I ſhall be, to the realms of 'bliſs before you, I ſhall hail your arrival there with 'tranſport, and rejoice to acknowledge that you was 'my comforter, my advocate, and my friend.'

Letter from Dr. Dodd to Dr. Johnſon. See Boſwell's Life of Johnſon, Vol. II. p. 140.

than he, ſpring from one and the ſame ſource. It prevents the genuine workings of real penitence, by enjoining confeſſions of imaginary demerit; it quenches religious gratitude, becauſe conceiving only of two ſtates of retribution, both in the extreme, and feeling that our crimes, whatever they may be, cannot have deſerved the one, we are not ſufficiently thankful for the proſpect of the other, which we look upon as only a neceſſary alternative. Laſtly, it diſſolves the connection between religion and common life, by introducing a ſet of phraſes and a ſtandard of moral feeling, totally different from thoſe ideas of praiſe and blame, merit and demerit, upon which we do and muſt act in our commerce with our fellow creatures.

There are periods in which the human mind ſeems to ſlumber, but this is not one of them. A keen ſpirit of reſearch is now abroad, and demands reform. Perhaps in none of the nations of Europe will their articles of faith, or their church eſtabliſhments, or their modes of worſhip, be able

to

to maintain their ground for many years in exactly the ſame poſition in which they ſtand at preſent. Religion and manners reciprocally act upon one another. As religion, well underſtood, is a moſt powerful agent in meliorating and ſoftening our manners; ſo, on the other hand, manners, as they advance in cultivation, tend to correct and refine our religion. Thus, to a nation in any degree acquainted with the ſocial feelings, human ſacrifices, and ſanguinary rites, could never long appear obligatory. The mild ſpirit of Chriſtianity has, no doubt, had its influence in ſoftening the ferocity of the Gothic times; and the increaſing humanity of the preſent period will, in its turn, produce juſter ideas of Chriſtianity, and diffuſe through the ſolemnities of our worſhip, the celebration of our ſabbaths, and every obſervance connected with religion, that air of amenity and ſweetneſs, which is the offſpring of literature, and the peaceful intercourſes of ſociety. The age which has demoliſhed dungeons, rejected torture, and given ſo fair

fair a proſpect of abolishing the iniquity of the ſlave trade, cannot long retain among its articles of belief the gloomy perplexities of Calviniſm, and the heart-withering perſpective of cruel and never-ending puniſhments.

FINIS.

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